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U.S. SAID TO THINK IRAN HAD KEY ROLE IN BEIRUT ATTACKS

Retaliation Reported Weighed — Rumsfeld Is Considered for Envoy to Mideast

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 28 — The Reagan Administration is now assuming that the Iranian Government played the key role in the bombing attacks on the American marines and French troops last Sunday and will retaliate once conclusive information is collected, Administration officials said today.

In another Middle East development, several officials said Donald H. Rumsfeld, who was Defense Secretary in the Ford Administration and is a friend of Secretary of State George P. Shultz, had been approached about becoming the next special envoy to the region.

Another name under consideration is that of Alfred L. Atherton Jr., the departing Ambassador to Egypt. It is possible, one official said, that they might divide the task, with Mr. Rumsfeld concentrating on Lebanon and Mr. Atherton on broader peace issues.

Replacement for McFarlane

President Reagan said Thursday night that he would soon announce a replacement for Robert C. McFarlane, the former Middle East envoy. Mr. McFarlane was recently named the White House national security adviser, replacing William P. Clark, the Secretary-designate of Interior. Mr. McFarlane, like his predecessor, Philip C. Habib, was responsible for both Lebanon and the peace talks.

On the attacks on the Americans and the French, a senior official said today, "I think it is fair to say that all the intelligence now points to the Iranians, in one form or the other, but we want to be very sure before we do anything." Mr. Reagan and Mr. Shultz have both said the United States will retaliate once those responsible are identified. Thursday night Mr. Reagan said, "Those who directed this atrocity must be dealt justice."

"They will be," he vowed.

On Wednesday, in a private meeting with some prominent Jewish Republicans, Mr. Reagan said, according to the White House transcript, which has not been publicly released, "I think the evidence that I have is sufficient that this last horrendous act involved Iranian terrorists and they were facilitated in their entry and in the provisions of the munitions by the Syrians."

Officials said one option under consideration was asking the Lebanese Government to close the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, which is believed to have been the nerve center for the bombings. Another option, officials said, was undertaking a commando raid in the Baalbek area, where there are Iranian revolutionary guards protecting a pro-Iranian Shiite group headed by Hussein Musavi, who held a news conference Thursday to praise Sunday's attacks but to deny he had anything to do with them.

Alan D. Romberg, a State Department spokesman, was asked about reports from Syria that said maneuvers were under way in anticipation of an attack by Western forces. He said he knew of "no basis for that" charge.

As to the range of retaliatory actions, Mr. Romberg said there was "still possibility of further terrorist attacks."

"In light of that possibility, one wants to take a certain degree of preventative measures," he said.

He said that once it was determined who was responsible, "a whole variety of factors will be applied and brought into play on what kind of option one would choose."

Officials said that the pattern of the attack, the fact that some people were seen hurriedly leaving the Iranian Embassy immediately after the explosions early Sunday morning and other intelligence information had pointed to the Iranians. It is also assumed that the Iranians would not have been able to move the explosives into Beirut without the connivance of the Syrians, they said.

Earlier in the week, reports from Beirut said that the French authorities had also linked the bombings to Iranians, primarily the Musavi group.

There is a reluctance to attack Syria directly, officials said, particularly at a time when Syrian cooperation for the talks on national reconciliation in Lebanon, due to begin on Monday in Geneva, is being sought.

Administration Debate

Mr. Romberg also said Lawrence S. Eagleburger, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, would head a State Department delegation to Israel from Nov. 1 to 6, for talks with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Defense Secretary Moshe Arens and others on a range of matters.

Other officials said a debate was going on within the Administration on whether Mr. Eagleburger would be able to offer to the Israelis additional forms of military and economic aid or to discuss closer strategic ties.

They said that Mr. Shultz, at a National Security Council meeting on Oct. 18, proposed a range of such measures but was opposed by Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger. Mr. Weinberger reportedly said that the United States had already done enough for Israel and that further cooperation, beyond the usual aid, would upset relations with Arab countries and was unnecessary.

Mr. McFarlane has been trying to work out a compromise between the two positions before Mr. Eagleburger leaves on his trip, officials said.

When asked to confirm that he had been approached about the Middle East appointment, Mr. Rumsfeld, through a spokesman, declined to discuss the matter.